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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

APRIL 1st, 1860.

POPULAR MUSIC OF THE OLDEN TIME.*

By W. CHAPPELL, F.S.A.

To persons who judge social phenomena by standards taken within the limits of their own actual experience, the taste for music that is so conspicuous in modern England seems a remarkable novelty, not altogether compatible with the national character. Scarcely thirty years have elapsed since the normal John Bull was supposed to entertain a manly abhorrence against the sing-song that delighted more frivolous foreigners, and the present generation has not yet forgotten the animadversions of the Chesterfields and Stevenses, who encouraged, in fashionable and literary circles, the want of sympathy with sweet sounds, already to be found in the multitude. But now music is the rage everywhere,—if, indeed, the word ‘rage’ can be applied to a steady predilection, which extends over all classes of the British public, and gives no signs of evanescence. Two opera-houses, and sometimes three, compete with each other for the patronage of those persons who love the dramatic form of the art; nor does the employment of the Italian language diminish the enjoyment of a large mass who would consider themselves very respectable scholars if they possessed a grammatical knowledge of their own tongue. The epicure, who seeks those delicacies less appreciated by the *profanum vulgus*, finds a series of *soirées* and *matinées* sufficient to occupy his mind with instrumental music of the most *recherché* kind for at least three months in every year. The lover of sacred music is content to pass three summer hours in a large uncomfortable room, as one of a dense crowd that listens to an Oratorio by Handel or by Mendelssohn. The humblest connoisseur who frequents music-halls, where smoking and drinking season the pleasure afforded by song, would not be content unless some specimen of a higher class of composition varied the ordinary Irish air and Nigger melody. Nor are people content to be hearers only; they want to play themselves and to sing themselves, after another fashion than that of their fathers, who loved what was called a ‘good song’ with a lusty chorus, after the now obsolete supper. The fashionable young gentlemen, who lounge and simper about drawing-rooms in the London season, are commonly proficient in more than one musical instrument, and often make a respectable figure in part-singing. The masses that constantly flock to receive instruction in the classes of Mr. John Hullah, prove how deeply a desire to become accomplished in music has penetrated the

less opulent portion of the community. Music is at present the art that, *par excellence*, is loved and respected by all conditions of Englishmen; and though, of course, the love is in some cases affected, such affectation is only analogous to the proverbial homage paid by vice to virtue in the shape of hypocrisy.

All this looks very odd to people who fancy that the English character is to be tested by the evidence of the last seventy years; but the antiquary, who carries his glance further back, is perfectly aware that the phenomenon, far from being a modern innovation, is the revival of a musical taste that existed in this country for centuries without interruption, and that the anti-musical tendencies which were so highly developed in the last century simply denoted an exceptional state of the British mind. As well might the Frenchman, born during the prevalence of the Revolutionary Calendar, regard the substitution of ‘1805’ for ‘XIV,’ and the transformation of the 10th Nivose into the 31st of December, as the Briton express astonishment at the passion for music manifested in his native island about the middle of the nineteenth century.

The very valuable and copious addition which Mr. W. Chappell has made to the history of popular music—and, we may add, of popular lyrical poetry—in England, expands into a bulky chronicle of facts the simple proposition that this is naturally the most musical of lands. We cannot go back far enough to ascertain when the English love of music began; we must come down to a very modern period before we find it in a lukewarm state.

As for the Welsh, they have notoriously gone harping on from time immemorial, and they have their harp-contests still. So different were the notions of the ancient Cambrian legislators from those of Lord Chesterfield, who allowed his son to pay for fiddlers, provided he did not fiddle himself, that, by the Leges Wallicæ, the possession of a harp and ability to play on it belonged to the essential attributes of a gentleman. He who was not a gentleman could not own a harp, as he would thus have been unduly exalted; he who was a gentleman could not be deprived of the instrument on account of debt, as he would thus have been unduly degraded.

Among the Anglo-Saxons, the connexion between the harp and the pedigree was equally close. The poet Cædmon, being of lowly origin, was unable to play the noble instrument. On one occasion, when in high company, he was expected to take his turn and accompany his song with tuneful strings; he left the feast, and going out, went home. So says the Venerable Bede:—‘*Surgebat e mediâ cænâ, et egressus ad suam domum repedabat.*’ But this cold narrative of the fact did not satisfy King Alfred, who, in his Saxon paraphrase of ‘Bede,’ states the poet’s feelings as well as his retreat. ‘*Aras he for sceome*’

* A Collection of Ancient Songs, Ballads, and Dance Tunes, illustrative of the National Music of England. London, 1859. (From the *Quarterly Review*.)

(he rose for shame), said the royal translator, himself a perfect musician for his age.

But we have no need of more anecdotes to show the proficiency of the Angle-Saxons, as Mr. Chappell's well-attested account of Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury, who died in 709, will amply prove :—

"The first specimen of musical notation given by the learned Abbot Gerbert, in his *De Cantu et Musica Sacra, a prima ecclesiæ ætate* (i. 202), is to a poem by St. Aldhelm, in Latin hexameters, in praise of virginity. This was written for the use of Anglo-Saxon nuns. The manuscript from which it is taken is, or was, in the monastery of St. Blaise, in the Black Forest, and Gerbert dates it as of the ninth or tenth century. It contains various poems of St. Aldhelm, all of which are with music, and the *Paschale Carmen* of Sedulius, one of the early Irish Christians, which is without music. Many very early English and Irish manuscripts were, without doubt, taken to Germany by the English and Irish priests, who assisted in converting the Germans to Christianity. St. Boniface, 'the apostle of Germany,' and first Archbishop of Mentz (Mayence), who was killed in the discharge of his duties in the year 755, was an Anglo-Saxon whose name had been changed from Winfred to Boniface by Pope Gregory II. 'Boniface seems always to have had a strong prejudice in favour of the purity of the doctrines of the church of his native country, as they had been handed down by St. Augustine: in points of controversy he sought the opinions of the Anglo-Saxon bishops, even in opposition to those inculcated by the Pope; and he sent for multitudes of Anglo-Saxons, of both sexes, to assist him in his labours.' (*Biog. Brit. Lit.*, i. 315.) He placed English nuns over his monastic foundations, and selected his bishops and abbots from among his countrymen. His successor in the Archbishopric was also an Englishman. To revert to St. Aldhelm—Faricius (a foreign monk of Malmesbury), who wrote his life about the year 1100, tells us that he exercised himself daily in playing upon the various musical instruments then in use, whether with strings, pipes, or any other variety by which melody could be produced. The words are, 'Musica autem artis omnia instrumenta quæ fidibus vel fistulis aut aliis varietatibus melodiæ fieri possunt, et memoria tenuit et in cotidiano usu habuit.' (*Faricius*, Col. 140, vo.) The anecdote of Aldhelm's stationing himself on the bridge in the character of a glee-man or minstrel, to arrest the attention of his countrymen who were in the habit of hurrying home from church when the singing was over, instead of waiting for the exhortation, or sermon,—and of his singing poetry of a popular character to them in order to induce them gradually to listen to more serious subjects,—was derived by William of Malmesbury from an entry made by King Alfred in his manual or note-book. Aldhelm died in 705, and King Alfred in 901—yet William of Malmesbury, who flourished about 1140, tells us that one of the 'trivial songs' to which Alfred alludes as written by Aldhelm for one of these occasions, was still sung by the common people. The literary education of youth, even of the upper classes, in Anglo-Saxon times, was limited to the being taught to commit the songs and literature of their country to memory. Every one of gentle blood was instructed in 'harp and song,' but it was only thought necessary for those who were to be priests or minstrels to be taught to read and write."

Nor were the Danes a whit behind the Saxons.

About sixty years after Alfred's well-known visit to the Danish camp, Anlaf, king of the Danes, retaliated the stratagem on King Athelstan, and, though he was discovered in spite of his disguise, this was not on account of any musical shortcomings, but through the very unprofessional circumstance that he buried the money which had been given him as a reward. The Norman, Taillefer, who marched in front of the army at the battle of Hastings, gained for himself a broad renown; but the fact is not to be overlooked, that on the evidence of Fordun, the English spent the night before the battle in singing and drinking.

Under the kings who immediately followed the Norman Conquest minstrelsy flourished much—so much, indeed, that the more rigid monks began to be jealous of the honours lavished upon the professors of the seemingly frivolous science. Henry II. and still more notoriously Richard I. were patrons of the kindred arts, poetry and music, and in the reign of John one party of minstrels did such good service, that their posterity retained an honourable name long after minstrelsy in general, fallen from its high estate, had degenerated into a calling for the lowest vagabonds. Ranulph, Earl of Chester, being besieged in his castle of Rothlan, in the year 1212, sent for help to De Lacy, constable of Chester, who making use of the minstrels assembled at Chester fair, brought together a vast number of persons, who under the conduct of a gallant youth, named Dutton, so completely terrified the Welsh besiegers, that the siege was speedily raised. As far down as the reign of Elizabeth, this Timotheus-like use of music was held in such honourable remembrance, that when minstrelsy was treated by legislators as a vulgar nuisance, only fit to be put down, an exception was made in favour of the Dutton family.

Although the very doubtful tradition that Edward I. extirpated the Welsh bards, and drew down upon his head the imprecations of the wordy old gentleman immortalized by Gray, places him in no favourable relation to the harper's profession, one of the most satisfactory records on the subject of old English minstrelsy refers to an event that occurred during his reign. This is a roll (printed for the Roxburghe club), containing the names of those who attended the *Cour plenièr*e held by the king at Westminster, and at the New Temple in the Whitsuntide of 1306. The six chiefs of the minstrels who figured on this occasion were all, like the magnates of the Heralds' College, 'kings,' though by no means equal to each other in rank, for whereas four of them received an amount equal to about 50*l.* of the present day, the sixth, 'Le Roy Druet,' was obliged to be content with a pittance of 2*l.* As the importance of minstrels increased, not only did these gifted persons abuse their high privileges, but impostors started up, hoping to share the bounty bestowed upon authorized talent. Both the realities and the 'shams' were restrained by a royal decree of 1315, by

which it was ordered that none should resort to the houses of prelates, earls, and barons, unless he were a minstrel, and that even of the suitable professors there should not come above three or four minstrels at the most in one day, unless he be desired of the master of the house.' The three or four, we may presume, had a right to play and to feast, whether invited or not, and this privilege seems to have descended, with modifications, to the organ-boys and artists on the hurdy-gurdy, who cause so much indignant letter-writing on the part of newspaper correspondents.

The glory of the minstrel presupposed a predilection for one kind of poetry and music among gentle and simple; consequently as poetry became learned and music became recondite, the ancient craftsman fell into rapid disrepute. Richard Sheale, one of the last of the race, who died in 1574, could not make people believe that he had been robbed of sixty pounds, on Dunsmore-heath. The 'chant' in which he describes this calamity, and which may almost be called the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel,' shows how far less profitable was poetry than retail commerce.

The numbers of poor Sheale are not very melodious, but he bears an honourable name, as the reputed preserver of 'Chevy Chace.'

At the time when the minstrels, who had delighted crowned heads and courts, were degraded into 'rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars,' the proficiency of the English in music was a theme of universal commendation. *Britanni, præter alia, formam, musicam et lautas mensas proprie sibi vindicent*, says Erasmus, in his 'Encomium Moriae.' Singing at sight was a common accomplishment among the courtiers of Henry VIII., who was himself a musical composer. He even patronised ballads and songs of the popular kind in the early part of his reign, though when they were used as weapons against the Reformation, he did all he could to suppress them. It is to an Act of 1533 against 'such books, ballads, rhymes, and songs, as be pestiferous and noisome,' that Mr. Chappell partly attributes the fact, that *printed* ballads of an early date are not now to be found.

When Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne, the musical taste of our ancestors reached its culminating point, nor was it in any way diminished during the whole of her long reign. At the beginning of the present century, when the connoisseurs of music had to make out for themselves a case against the disciples of the prosaic wits who guided the preceeding generation, they were wont to heap up innumerable citations from Shakespeare, to show that there was a high authority on their side; but in point of fact Shakespeare uttered no more than the general sentiment of his age, and the grave corporation of London was advertising the musical abilities of boys educated in Bridewell and Christ's Hospital, by way of recommending them as servants and apprentices, while the Bard of Avon was express-

ing his abhorrence of all those who were not 'mov'd with concord of sweet sounds.' 'Never trust a tailor that does not sing at his work, for his mind is of nothing but filching,' says an old fellow in one of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, and Tusser, in his 'Points of Huswifry,' published in 1570, says for the benefit of country matrons—"Such servants are oftenest painfull (*i.e.*, painstaking) and good, That sing in their labour, as birds in the wood."

But the moral obligation of learning music is most clearly set forth by Byrd, in his collection of Psalms and Sonnets, dated 1588:—

1st. "It is a knowledge easily taught, and quickly learned, where there is a good master and an apt scholar."

2nd. "The exercise of singing is delightful to nature, and good to preserve the health of man."

3rd. "It doth strengthen all parts of the breast, and doth open the pipes."

4th. "It is a singular good remedy for a stutting and stammering in the speech."

5th. "It is the best means to procure a perfect pronunciation, and to make a good orator."

6th. "It is the only way to know where nature hath bestowed a good voice; . . . and in many that excellent gift is lost, because they want art to express nature."

7th. "There is not any music of instruments whatsoever comparable to that which is made of the voices of men; where the voices are good, and the same well sorted and ordered."

8th. "The better the voice is, the meeter it is to honour and serve God therewith; and the voice of man is chiefly to be employed to that end."

"Since singing is so good a thing,

I wish all men would learn to sing."

The extent to which the very air of London was impregnated with melody and harmony in the Elizabethan epoch is thus vivaciously described by Mr. Chappell:—

"Tinkers sang catches, milkmaids sang ballads, carters whistled; each trade, and even the beggars, had their special songs; the bass viol hung in the drawing-room for the amusement of waiting visitors; and the lute, cittern [a species of guitar strung with wire], and virginals, for the amusement of waiting customers, were the necessary furniture of the barber's shop."

The barber, however, must not be dropped at once. He was as important in London, during the reign of Elizabeth, as he was at Bagdad under the "Commander of the Faithful," and we therefore extract Mr. Chappell's account of his connexion with popular music:—

"One branch of the barber's occupation in former days was to draw teeth, to bind up wounds, and to let blood. The parti-coloured pole, which was exhibited at the doorway, painted after the fashion of a bandage, was his sign, and the teeth he had drawn were suspended at the windows, tied upon lute-strings. The lute, the cittern, and the gittern hung from the walls, and the virginals stood in the corner of his shop. 'If idle,' says the author of 'The Trimming of Thomas Nashe,' 'barbers pass their time in life-delighting musique' (1597). The barber in Lyly's 'Midas' (1592) says to his apprentice, 'Thou knowest I have taught thee the knocking of the hands, like the

tuning of a cittern,' and Truewit, in Ben Jonson's 'Silent Woman,' wishes the barber 'may draw his own teeth, and add them to the lute-string.' In the same play, Morose, who had married the barber's daughter, thinking her faithless, exclaims, 'That cursed barber! I have married his *cittern*, that is common to all men.' One of the commentators not understanding this, altered it to 'I have married his *cistern*,' &c. Dekker also speaks of 'a barber's cittern for every serving-man to play upon.' One of the 'Merrie-conceited jests of George Peel' is the stealing of a barber's lute, and in Lord Falkland's 'Wedding Night,' we read, 'he has travelled and speaks languages, as a barber's boy plays o' th' gittern.' Ben Jonson says, 'I can compare him to nothing more happily than a barber's virginals; for every man may play upon him,' and in 'The Staple of News,' 'My barber Tom, one Christmas, got into a Masque at court, by his wit and the good means of his cittern, holding up thus for one of the music.' To the latter passage Gifford adds another in a note. 'For you know, says Tom Brown, that a cittern is as natural to a barber, as milk to a calf, or dancing bears to a bagpiper.'"

The music that occupied these various amateurs was naturally of a popular kind; for, in the scholastic compositions of the age, harmony alone was considered, and that of a recondite kind that did not appeal to the uncultivated—we may almost say—the unsophisticated ear.

(To be continued.)

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Index to the Musical Times.—An Organist is informed that a volume of the Musical Times is completed in 24 numbers, or two years. The present volume commenced on the 1st of March, 1859, and consequently the Index will not be prepared until February, 1861.

We cannot undertake to return offered contributions; the authors, therefore, will do well to retain copies.

We would request those who send us country newspapers, wishing us to read particular paragraphs, to mark the passage, by cutting a slip in the paper near it.

The late hour at which Advertisements reach us, interferes much with their proper classification.

Colored Envelopes are sent to all Subscribers whose payment in advance is exhausted. The paper will be discontinued where the Subscriber neglects to renew. We again remind those who are disappointed in getting back numbers, that only the music pages are stereotyped, and of the rest of the paper, only sufficient are printed to supply the current sale.

Notices of concerts and other information supplied by our friends in the country, must be forwarded as early as possible after the occurrence, otherwise they cannot be inserted. Our correspondents must specifically denote the date of each concert, for without such date no notice can be taken of the performance. All communications must be authenticated by the proper name and address of the writer.

Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

ABINGDON.—On the 24th of February, the members of the Musical Association, with the Rev. S. Edger's Music Class, held the first of a series of united choral meetings. The first part of the evening was devoted to a selection of Moore's Melodies, harmonized by Balfe; the remainder to selections from Mozart's Twelfth and Haydn's Third Masses, concluding with the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Beethoven's *Engedi*. The solos were sung by Mrs. Edger, Miss Richards, Mr. Shepherd, and Mr. Tayler.

ACTON.—On the 13th ult., the members of the Acton Choral Society gave a concert in aid of their funds. The success which attended the performers, under the direction of Mr. Lawrence, is very gratifying. The room was crowded upon the occasion.

AMPHILL.—The Amphill Choral Union Society gave their second concert, in the National School-room, on the 6th of March. The programme consisted entirely of

sacred music, which was performed very satisfactorily. Mr. J. and Miss R. Haines, of Bedford, were engaged to assist the amateurs.

BASFORD.—On the 6th of March, the Basford Choral Society gave a performance of the *Creation* in the spacious National School-room, Old Basford. The principal soprano and bass parts were taken by Miss Johnson and Mr. Essex, of Nottingham, and the tenor by Mr. C. Oldershaw, of Leicester. The harmonium, in the hands of Mr. Kirkby, of Beeston, was remarkably useful in filling in the passages belonging to the lighter wind instruments. The performance was equally creditable to the society and their conductor, Mr. Smedley.

BATH.—On Ash-Wednesday, a sacred concert was given by the Vocal Union, in the Great Room. Miss Howell, a young lady from Chippenham, and pupil of Mr. Bianchi Taylor, made a successful debut at this performance, and her reception must have been very gratifying to her. Mr. and Mrs. Pyne sang the music allotted to them in a most unexceptionable style. Mr. Howarth accompanied on the organ.—The Bath Choral Society have presented their conductor, Mr. Macfarlane, with a testimonial, as a recognition of his valuable services, and a token of his professional skill and excellence in conducting them. The ladies presented an ivory silver-mounted bâton, and the gentlemen a highly-ornamented music-stand.

BICESTER.—The Harmonic Society established in this town towards the close of the past year progresses very satisfactorily. Mr. C. Franklin, pianist, enjoys a reputation as a very pains-taking conductor, and a testimonial is about to be presented to him for his efficient and valuable services.

BIRMINGHAM.—An admirable entertainment took place at the Town Hall on Thursday evening, the 23rd of February, when the caterers for public approbation departed in a most praiseworthy manner from the hackneyed performances of the day, and put forward music having something of interest and novelty attached to it. The programme was divided into three parts:—first, the *Walpurgis Night*, by Mendelssohn; secondly, the *Dream*, a serenata, by Costa; and the third part contained a selection of solos and concerted music. The principal singers were Mr. and Mrs. Weiss, Miss L. Baxter, and Mr. Perren. The band and chorus comprised nearly 300 performers, who had evidently gone through an efficient training, and were well up in their parts. The solo singing was excellent, and elicited a warm manifestation of feeling. The concert went off with great éclat.

BRIGHTON.—A lecture on the Glee-writers of England was delivered at the Town Hall, on the 23rd of February, by Mr. G. Bentley, with illustrations by the Tonic Sol-Fa Singing Class. The lecture was listened to with great attention, and the selection of music was very creditably performed.—A CONCERT took place at the Royal Pavilion, on the 27th of February, in aid of the funds of the Brighton Dispensary. The principal singers were Miss Clara and Miss Henrietta Mackenzie, who delighted the audience with several songs and duets, which they executed in a most artistic manner.—At the Saturday Evening Concerts, given at the Railway Literary and Scientific Institution, on the 3rd of March, the Misses Mackenzie were engaged to sing the solo parts.

BUCKINGHAM.—On Thursday, the 18th ult., the Amateur Philharmonic Society gave their second concert for the season, in the Town Hall. Mr. J. Platt, conductor; Mr. A. Nelson, leader. Two overtures, with other instrumental selections, were performed by the band. The vocal part consisted chiefly of glees and songs.

CHEDDAR (Somerset).—The fourth vocal and instrumental concert of the season, given by the members of the Cheddar Singing Class and Mr. Jefferies' Amateur Band, took place in the National School-room on the 28th of

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